

Memo by Daniel Ellsberg/
to Henry Rowen and Robert
McNamara, accompanying TOP SECRET
his draft of the Secretary
of Defense's guidance on
JCS war plans, April 1961.

RELATION OF CURRENT PLANS AND POSTURE TO PROPOSED REQUIREMENTS

1. Survival and endurance.

(a) The current force cannot survive in major strength under well-coordinated enemy attack without quick reaction to tactical warning which is ambiguous and unreliable. Only the small Polaris force can endure under prolonged attack, and no current protected capability exists to control it. (Airborne alert is a current potential, and preparation could extend the interval during which planes in the air on positive control could await commitment.)

(b) No current strategic plans provide for a strategic reserve under any circumstances of central war; all ready vehicles, including all Polaris missiles, are committed to attack pre-planned targets as soon as possible.

2. Strict positive control.

(a) There are currently no realistic procedures for the authorization of a strategic response by high national authority in the event of a surprise attack destroying Washington. All duly constituted officials authorized to assume succession as Commander-in-Chief are normally located in Washington. Even a moderate attack on the U.S. command and control system today would eliminate, with high confidence, the possibility of a U.S. authorized or even coordinated response.

(b) In the absence of realistic plans or convincing assurance that authorization for an appropriate response will be forthcoming, there is widespread acceptance of the notion that unauthorized "initiative" will be necessary, either at high military levels of command (which are almost as vulnerable as Washington) or at low. Both this attitude itself, and the reluctance to institute reliable safeguards against unauthorized action which follows from it, increase the possibility of unauthorized "initiative" in a time of crisis, under the stress of ambiguous indications and an outage of communications with higher command.

TOP SECRET

(c) Although there are physical safeguards against accident, there are almost none against unauthorized action, either in connection with individual vehicles or in command post operations. Such safeguards are technically possible; in principle, they take the form of a combination lock on weapons, requiring a code sent by higher authority to unsafe or release the weapon.

(d) Such safeguards are particularly important in connection with weapons under dual control with an Ally; current "protection", furnished by the Ally itself, serves to guard against "third party" action but furnishes minimum inhibition against unilateral action by Allied forces themselves.

(e) "Super-safing" both against accident and unauthorized action is required for weapons on high alert or mobile. Currently, weapons on high alert with Allied forces, nominally under dual control, not only lack such special precautions but are atypically accident-prone, not having been designed for such operation.

(f) It would be unacceptable to lower the risk of accident at the cost of markedly raising the risk of deliberate enemy attack; solutions to the problems of accident and unauthorized action should not afford an enemy the opportunity to paralyze U.S. response totally by attack on the command and control system. Although the design of explicit procedures for authorization under all circumstances raises complicated issues, such procedures could be both safer and more reliable than current tacit, ambiguous and uncontrolled understandings.

3. Information

(a) Current plans (prior to the President's Budget Message) do not call for bomb alarm read-outs at offensive force bases or subordinate command posts. Many units, particularly outside the ZI, might have outage of communications as their only immediate indication of enemy attack, and that would be highly ambiguous.

(b) The current design of the bomb alarm system, including means of transmission of signals, is such that a small number of bombs might put it out of operation. Thus, even though it had indicated that an attack involving "at least," say, four

TOP SECRET

bombs had taken place, it would not be able to indicate even grossly the actual size of the attack, its nature (e.g., whether or not cities were being hit on a large scale), or its gross effects on U.S. bases; nor could it discriminate reliably between a large-scale, coordinated attack and an attack involving a few weapons, possibly as a result of unauthorized action or nth country action.

(c) Almost all information, status-reporting, intelligence, sensor and reconnaissance systems are either totally unprotected or vulnerable in vital links; inputs of data to surviving decision-makers would drop almost to zero at the outset of a major attack.

(d) The bomb alarm system as currently planned does not link different levels in the chain of command. No other highly reliable means of determining the status of higher command are currently provided; reliance is upon outage of communications, which is highly ambiguous.

4. Force flexibility.

(a) Current design of Minuteman missiles makes it impossible to fire fewer than 50 at a time.

(b) Current design of Minuteman missiles requires procedures which may take six hours to change the target of a missile from the one preset. If commitment within a few minutes or hours is required, the currently planned Minuteman force could be used only in blocs of 50 against preplanned targets.

(c) Current plans do not include options for covering alternative target systems; in the absence of such plans, rapid re-targeting of large numbers of bombers is almost impossible, even before attack. No protected facilities, or planning aids for rapid replanning, would allow such retargeting after attack.

(d) The almost total current lack of preparation and capability for post-attack reconnaissance, would severely limit the possibility, after initial attacks, of continued countermilitary action, even against soft, fixed missiles relying only on concealment for protection.

TOP SECRET

5. Counter military capability

(a) Lacking flexibility and the capability for rapid replanning just prior to or during attack, current counter military forces would have little ability to exploit actual inefficiencies or vulnerabilities in Soviet posture or tactics; in any case, they lack the protected information sources necessary to recognize such Soviet departures from conservative U.S. expectations.

(b) Even if U.S. counter military action were able markedly to reduce the weight of attack that the Soviets could launch against the U.S., other aspects of U.S. posture combine to ensure that even a small Soviet attack would be maximally potent;

1) The basing of U.S. bombers, missiles, carriers and Polaris submarines near major U.S. or Allied cities currently makes those cities "bonus" targets in a Soviet attack on U.S. forces. But the current plans for siting new missiles near or upwind of U.S. cities gratuitously adds to this problem. They decrease the force requirements by a deliberate enemy attack against both forces and U.S. population, and they increase the inadvertent destruction from an attack on U.S. forces alone.

2) Anti-bomber defenses current operate in highly vulnerable, centralized modes, and the defensive vehicles themselves are unprotected. The possible effectiveness of anti-missile defenses is still under question.

3) The current lack of adequate fallout protection in the U.S. means that even a very small attack--a large unauthorized Soviet action, an attack by a minor power, an aborted attack or one heavily attrited by U.S. counter military action--would cause very heavy U.S. casualties, even if the attack hit no major U.S. cities directly. Thus, measures proposed to reduce the likelihood of a large enemy attack, and especially a large attack against cities, could not lower U.S. casualties below an extremely large figure even under a relatively small attack.

6. Contingency planning.

(a) Current "alternative options" provide only for differing force size and coordination of attack upon a single, given

TOP SECRET

target system, corresponding to different intervals of warning. Even in the attack on this system, they do not provide for different patterns of U.S. base destruction in a surprise attack. They do not allow attack of alternative target systems, or deliberate postponement of attack on any part of the given target system.

(b) No current option provides for the avoidance or postponement of attack on major Soviet or Communist Chinese cities.

(c) No current option provides for minimizing non-military casualties in the U.S.S.R. or Communist China subject to the military requirements of strictly counterforce operations.

(d) No current option provides for the maintenance of ready forces (e.g., Polaris submarines) in strategic reserve.

(e) No current option provides for the exclusion of primary governmental control centers, or primary military control centers, from initial attack.

(f) No current option covers war with the Soviet Union alone, excluding or postponing attacks upon Communist China.

(g) The exclusion of one or more satellite nations from planned attacks would require procedures taking several hours to complete.

(h) Neither joint strategic plans, nor supporting plans, have normally been submitted to the President or to the Secretary of Defense for their inspection, review or approval, although nominally all directives to the unified and specified commanders are issued by authority and direction of the Secretary of Defense or the Commander-in-Chief.

7. Protected command

(a) See 2(a)

(b) A single bomb on Washington would seriously degrade military command capability, but it would virtually eliminate all constituted political authority and all experienced, fully informed political leadership. Such an explosion might be the result of accident, unauthorized action, nth country action, or badly executed or abortive enemy attack: all events putting the utmost premium on information, experience and authority both political and military.

TOP SECRET

(c) The possibility of precluding authorization of a response, and thereby possibly paralyzing or at least delaying a coordinated U.S. response, by hitting a few soft or semi-soft command posts in the U.S. makes those centers overwhelmingly attractive targets. If the cost of destroying U.S. primary command centers could be sharply raised, and the rewards to hitting them sharply lowered or even made negative (by assuring a maximal retaliatory response), the enemy would be forced, at the least, to reconsider the desirability of attacking them.

(d) Before 1961, plans for protection of primary leadership depended almost entirely on warning and relocation; yet the alternate relocation sites offer highly inadequate protection. There was, in effect, "no place to hide," even with warning. (Current plans for mobile sites should improve this situation).

8. Wartime control

(a) See 6a-g

(b) Once an authenticated "Execute" order has been received by SAC forces; SAC operational doctrine--and their lack of an authentication code for a "Stop" order--prevents them from being stopped by any authority.

(c) Since all current strategic options destroy all major Sino-Soviet urban-industrial centers and governmental/military control centers, and none maintains a strategic reserve, U.S. national

Memo by Daniel Ellsberg
to Henry Rowen and Robert
McNamara, accompanying
his draft of the Secretary
of Defense's guidance on
JCS war plans, April 1961.

TOP SECRET

RELATION OF CURRENT PLANS AND POSTURE TO PROPOSED REQUIREMENTS

1. Survival and endurance.

(a) The current force cannot survive in major strength under well-coordinated enemy attack without quick reaction to tactical warning which is ambiguous and unreliable. Only the small Polaris force can endure under prolonged attack, and no current protected capability exists to control it. (Airborne alert is a current potential, and preparation could extend the interval during which planes in the air on positive control could await commitment.)

(b) No current strategic plans provide for a strategic reserve under any circumstances of central war; all ready vehicles, including all Polaris missiles, are committed to attack pre-planned targets as soon as possible.

2. Strict positive control.

(a) There are currently no realistic procedures for the authorization of a strategic response by high national authority in the event of a surprise attack destroying Washington. All duly constituted officials authorized to assume succession as Commander-in-Chief are normally located in Washington. Even a moderate attack on the U.S. command and control system today would eliminate, with high confidence, the possibility of a U.S. authorized or even coordinated response.

(b) In the absence of realistic plans or convincing assurance that authorization for an appropriate response will be forthcoming, there is widespread acceptance of the notion that unauthorized "initiative" will be necessary, either at high military levels of command (which are almost as vulnerable as Washington) or at low. Both this attitude itself, and the reluctance to institute reliable safeguards against unauthorized action which follows from it, increase the possibility of unauthorized "initiative" in a time of crisis, under the stress of ambiguous indications and an outage of communications with higher command.

TOP SECRET

(c) Although there are physical safeguards against accident, there are almost none against unauthorized action, either in connection with individual vehicles or in command post operations. Such safeguards are technically possible; in principle, they take the form of a combination lock on weapons, requiring a code sent by higher authority to unsafe or release the weapon.

(d) Such safeguards are particularly important in connection with weapons under dual control with an Ally; current "protection", furnished by the Ally itself, serves to guard against "third party" action but furnishes minimum inhibition against unilateral action by Allied forces themselves.

(e) "Super-safing" both against accident and unauthorized action is required for weapons on high alert or mobile. Currently, weapons on high alert with Allied forces, nominally under dual control, not only lack such special precautions but are atypically accident-prone, not having been designed for such operation.

(f) It would be unacceptable to lower the risk of accident at the cost of markedly raising the risk of deliberate enemy attack; solutions to the problems of accident and unauthorized action should not afford an enemy the opportunity to paralyze U.S. response totally by attack on the command and control system. Although the design of explicit procedures for authorization under all circumstances raises complicated issues, such procedures could be both safer and more reliable than current tacit, ambiguous and uncontrolled understandings.

3. Information

(a) Current plans (prior to the President's Budget Message) do not call for bomb alarm read-outs at offensive force bases or subordinate command posts. Many units, particularly outside the ZI, might have outage of communications as their only immediate indication of enemy attack, and that would be highly ambiguous.

(b) The current design of the bomb alarm system, including means of transmission of signals, is such that a small number of bombs might put it out of operation. Thus, even though it had indicated that an attack involving "at least," say, four

TOP SECRET

bombs had taken place, it would not be able to indicate even grossly the actual size of the attack, its nature (e.g., whether or not cities were being hit on a large scale), or its gross effects on U.S. bases; nor could it discriminate reliably between a large-scale, coordinated attack and an attack involving a few weapons, possibly as a result of unauthorized action or nth country action.

(c) Almost all information, status-reporting, intelligence, sensor and reconnaissance systems are either totally unprotected or vulnerable in vital links; inputs of data to surviving decision-makers would drop almost to zero at the outset of a major attack.

(d) The bomb alarm system as currently planned does not link different levels in the chain of command. No other highly reliable means of determining the status of higher command are currently provided; reliance is upon outage of communications, which is highly ambiguous.

4. Force flexibility.

(a) Current design of Minuteman missiles makes it impossible to fire fewer than 50 at a time.

(b) Current design of Minuteman missiles requires procedures which may take six hours to change the target of a missile from the one preset. If commitment within a few minutes or hours is required, the currently planned Minuteman force could be used only in blocs of 50 against preplanned targets.

(c) Current plans do not include options for covering alternative target systems; in the absence of such plans, rapid re-targeting of large numbers of bombers is almost impossible, even before attack. No protected facilities, or planning aids for rapid replanning, would allow such retargeting after attack.

(d) The almost total current lack of preparation and capability for post-attack reconnaissance, would severely limit the possibility, after initial attacks, of continued countermilitary action, even against soft, fixed missiles relying only on concealment for protection.

TOP SECRET

5. Counter military capability

(a) Lacking flexibility and the capability for rapid replanning just prior to or during attack, current counter military forces would have little ability to exploit actual inefficiencies or vulnerabilities in Soviet posture or tactics; in any case, they lack the protected information sources necessary to recognize such Soviet departures from conservative U.S. expectations.

(b) Even if U.S. counter military action were able markedly to reduce the weight of attack that the Soviets could launch against the U.S., other aspects of U.S. posture combine to ensure that even a small Soviet attack would be maximally potent;

1) The basing of U.S. bombers, missiles, carriers and Polaris submarines near major U.S. or Allied cities currently makes those cities "bonus" targets in a Soviet attack on U.S. forces. But the current plans for siting new missiles near or upwind of U.S. cities gratuitously adds to this problem. They decrease the force requirements by a deliberate enemy attack against both forces and U.S. population, and they increase the inadvertent destruction from an attack on U.S. forces alone.

2) Anti-bomber defenses current operate in highly vulnerable, centralized modes, and the defensive vehicles themselves are unprotected. The possible effectiveness of anti-missile defenses is still under question.

3) The current lack of adequate fallout protection in the U.S. means that even a very small attack--a large unauthorized Soviet action, an attack by a minor power, an aborted attack or one heavily attrited by U.S. counter military action--would cause very heavy U.S. casualties, even if the attack hit no major U.S. cities directly. Thus, measures proposed to reduce the likelihood of a large enemy attack, and especially a large attack against cities, could not lower U.S. casualties below an extremely large figure even under a relatively small attack.

6. Contingency planning:

(a) Current "alternative options" provide only for differing force size and coordination of attack upon a single, given

TOP SECRET

target system, corresponding to different intervals of warning. Even in the attack on this system, they do not provide for different patterns of U.S. base destruction in a surprise attack. They do not allow attack of alternative target systems, or deliberate postponement of attack on any part of the given target system.

(b) No current option provides for the avoidance or postponement of attack on major Soviet or Communist Chinese cities.

(c) No current option provides for minimizing non-military casualties in the U.S.S.R. or Communist China subject to the military requirements of strictly counterforce operations.

(d) No current option provides for the maintenance of ready forces (e.g., Polaris submarines) in strategic reserve.

(e) No current option provides for the exclusion of primary governmental control centers, or primary military control centers, from initial attack.

(f) No current option covers war with the Soviet Union alone, excluding or postponing attacks upon Communist China.

(g) The exclusion of one or more satellite nations from planned attacks would require procedures taking several hours to complete.

(h) Neither joint strategic plans, nor supporting plans, have normally been submitted to the President or to the Secretary of Defense for their inspection, review or approval, although nominally all directives to the unified and specified commanders are issued by authority and direction of the Secretary of Defense or the Commander-in-Chief.

7. Protected command

(a) See 2(a)

(b) A single bomb on Washington would seriously degrade military command capability, but it would virtually eliminate all constituted political authority and all experienced, fully informed political leadership. Such an explosion might be the result of accident, unauthorized action, nth country action, or badly executed or abortive enemy attack: all events putting the utmost premium on information, experience and authority both political and military.

TOP SECRET

(c) The possibility of precluding authorization of a response, and thereby possibly paralyzing or at least delaying a coordinated U.S. response, by hitting a few soft or semi-soft command posts in the U.S. makes those centers overwhelmingly attractive targets. If the cost of destroying U.S. primary command centers could be sharply raised, and the rewards to hitting them sharply lowered or even made negative (by assuring a maximal retaliatory response), the enemy would be forced, at the least, to reconsider the desirability of attacking them.

(d) Before 1961, plans for protection of primary leadership depended almost entirely on warning and relocation; yet the alternate relocation sites offer highly inadequate protection. There was, in effect, "no place to hide," even with warning. (Current plans for mobile sites should improve this situation).

8. Wartime control

(a) See 6a-g

(b) Once an authenticated "Execute" order has been received by SAC forces; SAC operational doctrine--and their lack of an authentication code for a "Stop" order--prevents them from being stopped by any authority.

(c) Since all current strategic options destroy all major Sino-Soviet urban-industrial centers and governmental/military control centers, and none maintains a strategic reserve, U.S. national